

Dear Honorable Co-chairs Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Irene Westfall, and I am a senior at Wesleyan University. As a member of the climate action group Sunrise Movement Wesleyan, I find it imperative to write to you in support of HB 5285, An Act Concerning the Public School Curriculum. Along with many essential provisions about financial literacy and teaching African American, Puerto Rican, and other histories, the bill requires Next Gen Science Standards-based climate education in all public schools.

The climate crisis isn't a far-off problem. We feel its impact here and now in extreme weather events and respiratory health problems, and we see how the global reliance on fossil fuels drives political crises like Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Kids already experience the impacts of climate change in their daily lives and they need to learn the full dimensions of the crisis.

We can't bury our heads in the sand and we can't expect children to, either. I'm 21. I know that the rest of my life will be spent dealing with and trying to mitigate climate change, and everyone my age or younger is in the same boat. I believe it's crucial that younger generations be given the knowledge they need in order to be active members in this fight for climate justice.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that while we are all affected by climate change, the issue does not impact everyone equally. Climate change is a threat multiplier, and as such, it impacts marginalized and vulnerable groups disproportionately, including Black, Indigenous, Asian and other people of color. Thus, it is crucial that the public is educated on these facts.

Public support for climate crisis education is overwhelming - last year the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication found that 78% of registered voters already support this policy. With rising public support and a heightening climate crisis, this is the crucial moment to mandate climate education for our students by voting yes and supporting HB 5285.

Regards,
Irene Westfall